

# Plans For Gas Drilling Bring Protests

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*SALT LAKE CITY* - Plans for natural gas wells along the White River in eastern Utah have drawn objections from more than 50,000 people.

Conservation groups rallied members and others across the country to register the complaints as part of an environmental analysis being completed by the Bureau of Land Management. Only a few hundred people supported development.

The south side of the White River, which flows from the Rocky Mountains of Colorado into Utah's Green River, is largely undeveloped with just a few scattered gas wells on parcels of state trust lands.

The BLM could approve 60 more gas wells on federal land proposed for wilderness, with deep canyons, high ridges and an area of incised rock that surveyor John Wesley Powell dubbed Goblin City in 1869.

The White River, a free-flowing river for much of its length, is a favorite for rafting and canoeing. It marks a boundary of sorts between intensive oil and gas development to the north, in the Uinta basin, and wildlife-rich wilderness in Utah's remote Book Cliffs region.

"Who would float down a river littered with the sights and sounds of natural gas development? No one," said Marty Genereux, who runs a river guide service out of Centennial, Colo.

Opposing the gas development are the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Natural Resources Defense Council and The Wilderness Society.

"We got the word out to the country that this is one of the special places – that's what the BLM calls it – in the American West that's at risk. You ignore 50,000 citizens at your own peril," said Stephen Bloch, staff attorney for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance.

A BLM assessment of potential wilderness called the scenery along the Whiter River "exceptional."

Utah has 7,378 producing oil and gas wells, and energy companies are sitting on 3,357 drill permits approved over the year, said Bloch, who contends enough land has been made available for oil and gas development.

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